

E-LETTER 324 – 9 July 2020

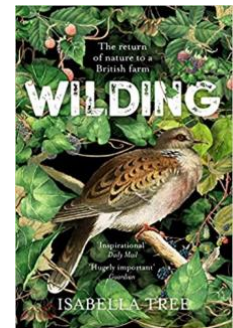
Opening Reflection by the Revd Robert Bushby

Mission Development Officer

How has your church's mission been affected in the lockdown? Many churches have been doing things differently: using Zoom and other platforms for meetings, study groups and prayer; live-streaming services, recording services and podcasts, together with webinars. Churches have seen an increase in the number of people accessing online services and asking about prayer during the Covid-19 crisis. There have been new Fresh Expressions of church community springing up and one church in Lincolnshire, thinking about how they were going to look after their congregation pastorally, formed 40 new Life Groups. Many organisations have put their training materials online (e.g. The Bible Course, Christianity Explored, Alpha and Mission Shaped Ministry) and are getting many applicants from all over the country.

So, in the 'New Normal', can we afford to go back to the old way of doing things? What are we going to do that is different? These are questions that have been exercising my 'little grey cell' since lock-down has begun to ease.

At the beginning of the lockdown, I read a book called '**Wilding**' by **Isabella Tree**, which tells the story of the Knepp Estate in Sussex, not far from my last pastorate. Forced to accept that intensive farming of the heavy clay soils of their estate was driving it close to bankruptcy, Isabella and her husband, Charlie, took a spectacular leap of faith in the year 2000 and handed their 3,600 acre estate back to nature. With minimal human intervention, and with herds of free-roaming animals stimulating new habitats, their land is now heaving with life. Rare species such as turtle doves, nightingales, peregrine falcons and purple emperor butterflies are now breeding at Knepp and biodiversity has rocketed.



This has got some people in the church thinking and **Paul Bradbury**, an Anglican pioneer minister from Poole in Dorset, spoke recently at the Lincolnshire Pioneer network about it. He writes:

'The unfolding story of the Knepp estate might be read as a parable for the church in the UK. We use methods that in many contexts are not fruitful or sustainable, and others which are resource intensive and programmatic. We are amalgamating parishes (in our case churches) in the hope of sustaining what we do. Yet, in many ways we too are farming in the old ways on land which is now marginal, and we need to stop and deeply listen to our context. When our machines have stopped and the dust settled we may just be able to discern the nature of the soil at our feet.

'Where this has happened, it seems that people have rediscovered the 'keystone species' of the church – the apostles, the prophets and evangelists who have been marginal if not extinct in our church life for so long. They are being reintroduced and are bringing a renewed diversity; a diversity which is also surprising and which confounds and challenges the assumptions of many of our experts of the church.

'*Wilding* invites humans to be facilitators of the vision of nature, or of the Spirit. In this model our role is as enablers, curators and observers. We say "Yes, that's a nightingale, but we never expected it to breed there", or "Yes, that's church, but we never expected it to look like that!'

Digital General Assembly



This edition of the e-letter would have coincided with General Assembly in Birmingham, had the health crisis not forced its cancellation. However, some of the vital business of General Assembly continues online.

There will be a short General Assembly meeting on **Saturday 11 July at 10.30 a.m.** (until 12.00 noon) which will be live streamed. The main business of the Assembly is worship, within which the new Assembly Moderators, the **Revd Clare Downing** and **Mr Peter Pay**, and new General Secretary, **Revd Dr John Bradbury**, will be inducted to their roles. The live stream will be available to watch via the [URC's Facebook page](#) and will also be shared on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0u6K8GFJ6is> and on the URC website: <https://urc.org.uk/latest-news/3520-digital-general-assembly-due-to-take-place>

Mission Council, meanwhile, will convene virtually on Friday 10 July, to deal with urgent business and accept the Resolutions in the Book of Reports. East Midlands Synod representatives will be the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke**, Moderator, **Mrs Helen Lidgett**, **Mr David Greatorex** and **Ms Ella Lemon**, our Youth Rep. Mission Council will be asked to recognise **Church Without Walls** in Milton Keynes and the **New Lubbesthorpe Mission Project** in Leicestershire.

Synod representatives to General Assembly met by Zoom on 29th June for a briefing session which covered a range of the material in the Book of Reports. They will be available to share information about Assembly business with the churches and report back to our October Synod. Key areas will also be highlighted in future e-letters.

Pray4URC with the Moderators-elect of General Assembly

Prior to their Inductions as Assembly Moderators, the **Revd Clare Downing** and **Mr Peter Pay** join **GEAR** (the URC's Group for Evangelism And Renewal) on [Facebook](#) this evening (Thursday 9 July) at 8.15pm to pray about the challenging situation many URC congregations, Synods and staff are facing.

To accept the open invitation to join in prayer, visit:
<https://www.facebook.com/Pray4URC>



Pray4URC
Thursdays 8:15 - 8:35

Hosted by  **The United Reformed Church**

 **Group for Evangelism And Renewal**
within the United Reformed Church

Digital discussions about Israel and Palestine

The URC's **Interfaith Relations** team has organised two webinars linked to General Assembly, focusing on **Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories**.

On Tuesday 14 July from 7.00-8.15pm, a panel will share their experiences of 2019's educational visit to the region in 2019 via Zoom. Those taking part include the East Midlands Synod's representative on the trip, the **Revd Jenny Mills**.



A week later, on Tuesday 21 July from 7.00-8.15pm, the **Revd Dr Munther Isaac**, Pastor of the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem and Academic Dean at the Bethlehem Bible College, will give a first-hand account of life in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, live from Bethlehem

Further details are available [on the URC website](#). To take part, please email carole.sired@urc.org.uk

Vacancy: Synod Clerk

Applications are welcome for the role of **EAST MIDLANDS SYNOD CLERK**.

The Synod Council is looking to recruit a new **Synod Clerk** to start during the autumn of 2020 in a voluntary capacity for, on average, 10 hrs per week.

The role holder is required to spend time in the Synod office in Nottingham but will be mainly home-based with travel across the geography of the EM Synod.

Applications are welcome from URC elders, members, retired ministers and ministers, including non-stipendiary ministers.

The role of the Synod Clerk in the East Midlands Synod has four principal elements:

- To serve as Clerk to the Synod and Synod Council
- To be responsible for enabling Synod engagement with General Assembly
- To provide advice, guidance and support on the structure, governance and procedures of the United Reformed Church
- To serve as one of the Synod Officers alongside the Moderator and Treasurer.

The role description, person specification and application forms are available from the Synod office or from the website www.urc5.org.uk. To arrange an informal discussion with the Moderator and/or current Clerk please contact the EM Synod Office: admin@urc5.org.uk or **0115 960 9241**.

Closing date for applications: Monday 17th August

Interview date: 7th September 2020 in the Synod Office or via video conference.

Practical Guidance for Churches



Emerging into the “new normal”

The United Reformed Church recently updated its advice to churches as lockdown restrictions continue to be eased.

[Emerging into the “new normal”](#) combines clear policy with a framework for further discussion in local churches. It contains detailed advice on resuming church activities but urges a cautious and considered approach in which we ask: “What MUST resume, what SHOULDN’T, and what might we do differently?”

The document also incorporates a **Personal Risk Assessment** which, without claiming to offer full medical advice, allows us to rate our individual risk if exposed to Covid-19. This may be downloaded at

https://urc.org.uk/images/Communications/docs/Personal_Risk_Assessment.pdf with an example of its use at <https://urc.org.uk/images/Personal-Risk-Assessment-example.pdf>

Emerging into the “new normal” can be read in full at:

https://urc.org.uk/images/Communications/docs/Emerging_into_the_new_normal.pdf

Notifying East Midlands Synod Trust

In accordance with the guidance in **Emerging into the “new normal”**, churches which plan to reopen their buildings are reminded that they should first advise the Trustees of their decision. In the East Midlands Synod, please notify **Mr Geoff Milnes**, Property Officer: <mailto:property@urc5.org.uk>

Information for treasurers

The charity Stewardship has a dedicated page for church treasurers and anyone concerned with church finances, and one just for information during this time of pandemic.



The page aims to answer questions that churches may be facing at this time:

<https://www.stewardship.org.uk/information/covid-page-2>

Personal news

We have been informed by South Western Synod of the death of one of their retired ministers, the **Revd Peter Newell**, who died peacefully on Sunday 5th July 2020. Peter served at Stockwell Green from 1956-61; as Chaplain for the British Sailors' Society from 1961-77; and at Upminster 1977-92. He had been living in Bristol in his retirement.

The funeral will be on Friday 31st July and the service will be live streamed. There will be a link on the Synod website nearer the time: www.urcsouthwest.org.uk. Our thoughts and prayers are with Stephen and the wider family at this sad time.

A Prayer for Leicester

As lockdown has been extended in one of the cities within our Synod, Moderator the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke** joined with other church leaders through Churches Together in Leicester and Leicestershire to offer the following prayer.



A PRAYER FOR THOSE WITHIN THE LEICESTER LOCKDOWN ZONE

*offered by the Church Leaders of
Churches Together in Leicester and Leicestershire*

Loving God,
ever-present with your people
through the highs and lows of life,
we cry out to you for Leicester
in the face of prolonged suffering and hardship
as a result of lockdown.
Grant us peace in our frustration;
strength to our NHS and all who are called to care and help;
wisdom to our city leaders;
and discernment for our churches
in offering the medicine of your gospel.
Bless all caught in the grip of Covid-19 and comfort the grieving.
In the name of the One who gives us hope,
Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mrs Marlies Adam, The Lutheran Church of Great Britain
Revd Helen Cameron, Chair, Northampton Methodist District
Revd Geoffrey Clarke, Moderator, East Midlands Synod, United Reformed Church
Revd Mark Clay, Regional Team Leader, East Midland Baptist Association
Rt Revd Gulli Francis-Dehqani, Bishop of Loughborough (Church of England)
Major Martin Hill, Divisional Commander, Central East Division (Salvation Army)
Mr Michael Hockaday, Congregational Federation
Jenny Mattingly, The Society of Friends
Rt Revd Patrick McKinney, Bishop of Nottingham (Roman Catholic)
Rt Revd Martyn Snow, Bishop of Leicester (Church of England)



Around the East Midlands

Good news from Leicester

We are delighted to receive this heartening report from **Alison Hadley** about the great work taking place at **Abbots Road URC, Leicester** during the prolonged lockdown:



Who could have imagined at the beginning of March that we would face 16 long weeks of not being able to live the normal life we have realised we sometimes take for granted. So here we are, 4 months on and our church has blossomed and we, as an eldership, have facilitated connections in so many ways and with such creativity. God has been so faithful, and we, as his disciples, have worked hard to enable and engage our congregation from the youngest to the oldest.

We realised, quite early on, that belonging to a fellowship that worships together is so important to our people, and this was taken away very suddenly and quickly back in March. It meant we had to think of ways to continue to be together and we discovered **Zoom**.

Every fifth Saturday at Abbots Road, we have a coffee morning for our chosen charity for the year. This year we chose to support **Rainbows Hospice**. We knew that due to lockdown, our coffee mornings would not be able to happen so on Saturday 4 April I organised a Zoom coffee morning with 6 devices and 9 people. As it was relatively easy, we decided there and then that we would have a go at 'church by Zoom.' Our first service was the following day and most of our eldership and a couple of others joined together for worship. It was a different kind of wonderful and has become part of our lockdown routine. We had services all through **Holy Week** and our congregation has grown: on Sunday 5 July we welcomed 24 people on Zoom and 3 by telephone and our newest Zoom member joined at the amazing age of 96!

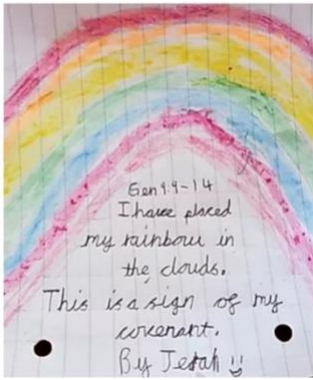
In addition to these events we also hold a **quiz night** every Wednesday. We have a **prayer chain** and a **fellowship group** on WhatsApp and since 23 March, we have joined together each evening at 7pm to light a candle, sing a hymn (shared through the app) and pray in our own homes, and yet still together.

We are aware that there are some in our congregation who are not able to access these interactive services so we text or call them with an order of service so that they can still feel a part of our fellowship.

At Abbots Road, we are blessed with many children and young people who join us at church from **Pilots to Messy Church** and our **Cogs** (Children of God on a Sunday). The young people and their families have been set tasks and they have all been eager to share their work and creativity.

At Abbots Road we have huge glass doors and windows and once the church closed it looked very closed. The idea came to flood the windows with colour and so the children associated with the church and from the community were invited to create pictures for the windows. This has brightened the church and the pictures and messages have been enjoyed by those walking past. It tells the story that the church, whilst closed, is still very much alive.





It saddened us to realise that for the first time in 29 years, we would not be able to have our **Holiday Club** this summer. But our sadness soon turned to joy and excitement when we decided to hold a virtual Holiday Club at the end of July. Our theme is to be **The Rainbow Connection**, using the promise of hope of this wonderful and incredible creation of colour which has become synonymous with this time of pandemic.

And so we move forward in faith, knowing that this is to be our new normal for the time being. We move forward in faith, knowing that Christ walks beside us and His Spirit carries us through each new day.

Sharing creativity

Also based at Abbots Road, the Synod Pilots Officer **Gus Webbe** adds a plea about sharing work online:

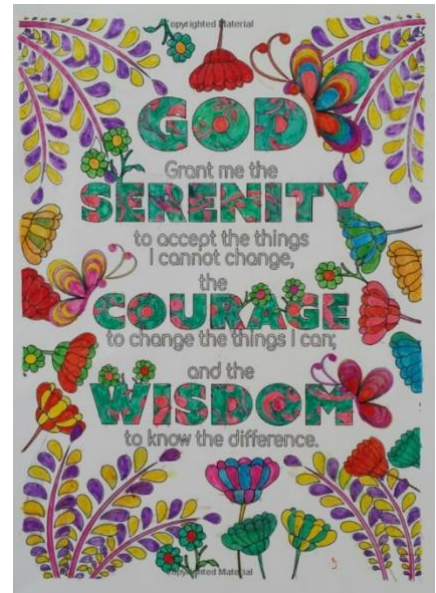
Please let the East Midlands community know what you are doing by making good use of your church website. We at **Abbots Road URC** have been busy being creative with all of God's children, from 0-96 years old. Our website is full of images of creations, with our rainbow of hope filling our church windows, our Messy Church colourful challenge, our Pilots Easter challenge, VE celebrations, our thanks to the NHS and more. Visit our website to see what we have been up to with our children of God: <https://www.abbotsroadurc.com>

Your church website could be just as colourful, as I am aware many churches are being equally as creative but just not always putting these wonderful creations on their website.

God bless.

One of the resolutions coming before this week's virtual **Mission Council** urges every URC congregation to ensure it has a well-maintained website.

We are equally glad to share news and good practice from local churches in this e-letter: please email training@urc5.org.uk or modpa@urc5.co.uk.



Discovery Church

Church Without Walls in Milton Keynes has responded to the changing coronavirus guidelines with Discovery Church, an innovative adaptation of its successful **Forest Church**.

Each month a self-guided reflective walking route is shared, that can be done with family and friends according to the current government guidance. Currently, two different households can do this together OR up to 6 people from different households, observing social distancing rules. July's walk around **Campbell Park** in central Milton Keynes includes five reflection points along the route, with prayers and reflections drawing on Paul's letters to the early church. For full details, see the route Map at: <https://www.mkchurchwithoutwalls.org.uk/worship/discovery-church/>.

Mead Centre Update



The following report of progress on the **Mead Centre** development comes from the **Revd Jenny Mills**, minister at **Newport Pagnell URC** (pictured here modelling one of the t-shirts raising money towards the project).

So much has been going on in the last few weeks that I thought an update a good idea.

As the building takes shape, we have continued fundraising through sponsored events, lockdown t-shirts and more. Meanwhile publicity has increased via the [Mead Centre website](#), all social media platforms and a series of special [podcasts](#).

The podcasts consist of musings about the Mead Centre and allow us to share highs and low of the project. Currently we are speaking to members of the Vision Team and the community about what the Mead Centre means to them and why they think it is so important. They are published at <https://anchor.fm/themeadcentre> and available on a range of platforms including Spotify, Google Podcasts and Radio Podcasts.

Links can also be found on our [Facebook](#), Twitter and Instagram pages:

Facebook: The Mead Centre

Instagram: the_mead_centre

Twitter: @themeadcentre



Fundraising continues apace. The **Revd John Reardon**, a former Moderator of General Assembly and Deputy General Secretary of the URC, is fundraising for the community building by walking 88 miles over one month of his 88th year. Find out more and sponsor him at: <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/john-reardon2>

Meanwhile we have teamed up with a local designer and a t-shirt printing company to offer three unique t-shirt designs, showing items much prized in the lockdown: pasta and flour, toilet roll and hand sanitizer! Each sale brings us 15% commission - or 20% if we sell over 100. The t-shirts designed by [@befuddled_art](#) can be bought by visiting www.chargrilled.co.uk (search for "Mead Centre").



Follow the progress of the Mead Centre development at www.themeadcentre.co.uk.

Hate crime funding

In view of recent press reports about the fears of UK faith groups about their vulnerability to attack during worship, please note that the fifth round of applications to the government's **Places of Worship (POW): protective security funding scheme** has now opened and remains open until Sunday 9 August 2020. To date 180 places of worship have been awarded grants to install measures such as protective alarms, security lighting and access controls.

For further details visit <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/places-of-worship-security-funding-scheme#history>

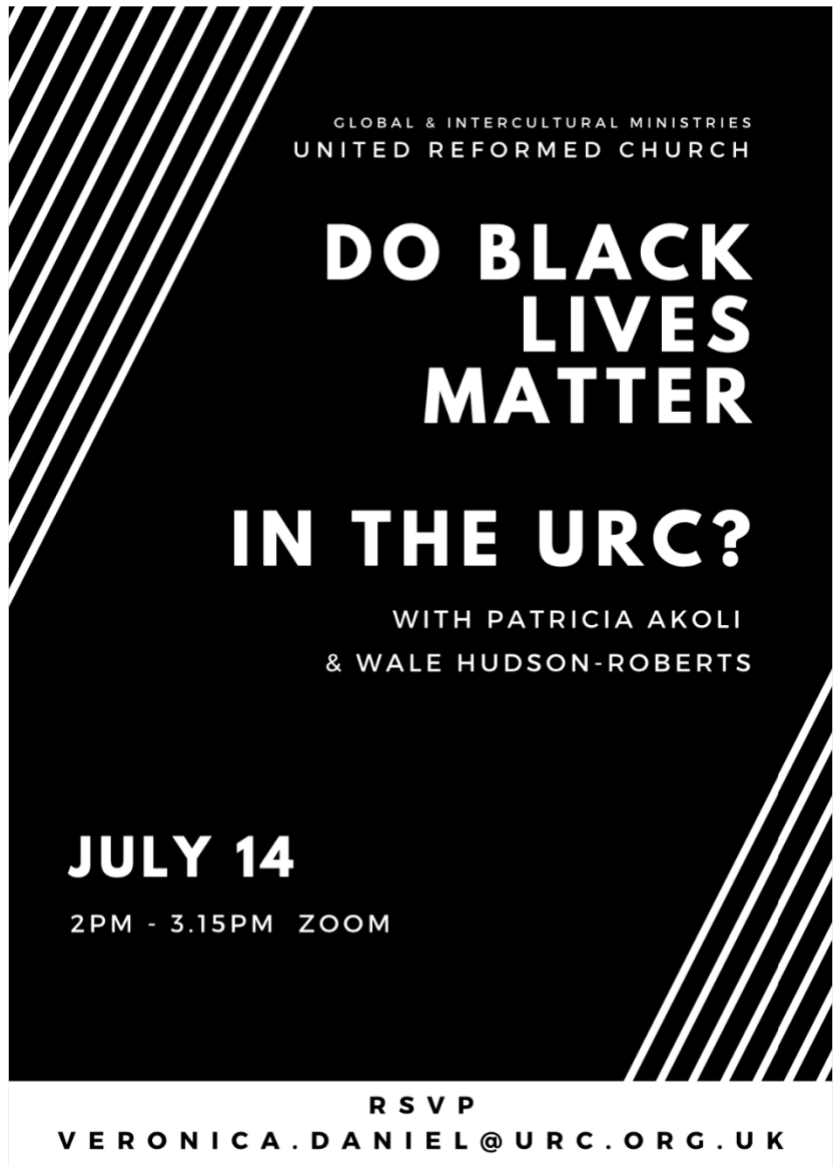
Do Black Lives Matter in the URC?

On Tuesday 14 July at 2.00pm, the URC's Secretary for Global & Intercultural Ministries and CRCW **Karen Campbell** hosts an open forum via Zoom to ask: do Black Lives Matter in our world... in our society... in our churches... in the URC?

'For too long, black communities have borne the brunt of systemic injustices, impacting their health, their finances, their education, their prospects, their lives.'

Promising a lively and informative discussion, the panel includes **Wale Hudson-Roberts** (Justice Enabler for the Baptist Union of Great Britain) and **Patricia Akoli** (youth and community arts worker and a Diversity Awareness trainer for the URC).

To register your interest and receive the Zoom link please email veronica.daniel@urc.org.uk.



GLOBAL & INTERCULTURAL MINISTRIES
UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

DO BLACK LIVES MATTER IN THE URC?

WITH PATRICIA AKOLI
& WALE HUDSON-ROBERTS

JULY 14

2PM - 3.15PM ZOOM

RSVP
VERONICA.DANIEL@URC.ORG.UK

Protests at the merger of DfID and the Foreign Office

Charles Jolly, Synod Commitment for Life Advocate, relays the following:

Although it had been talked about for some time, the Government's decision in June to merge the **Department for International Development** with the Foreign Office came as a shock to the dedicated staff of DfID and to the 'development community'. The Prime Minister was commendably candid about the reason. Confirming that the Government remained committed to spending 0.7% of GNI on overseas development, he said:

"This is exactly the moment when we must mobilise every one of our national assets, including our aid budget and expertise, to safeguard British interests and values overseas. And the best possible instrument for doing that will be a new department charged with using all the tools of British influence to seize the opportunities ahead."

Christian Aid, TEARFUND, Save the Children and others condemned the move as signalling a shift from using aid to reduce poverty to promoting British national self interest. Tony Blair had created the independent DfID in 1997 to separate aid from foreign policy.

The JPIC Group, with Christian Aid, invites you to ask your MP to write to Boris Johnson to:

- Let him know that you wish to see the government retain an independent department focussed on eradicating poverty.
- Ask that he consults with the leaders of the world's poorest countries who are recipients of DFID funding, and get their views on whether a proposed merger will help or hinder the battle against extreme poverty in their country.
- Ask that he takes particular note of the views of the 46 Commonwealth nations who receive DFID funding, and with whom he has pledged to 'forge stronger links'.

Celebrating Children's and Youth Work



Free online event: Let's celebrate

The URC's **Children's and Youth Work Committee** and **URC Youth** invite you to an online event entitled [Let's celebrate: children and young people in the URC](#), taking place on Wednesday 15 July from 7.00-8.00pm.

All are invited to come and share in an uplifting hour focussing on all that has been happening with 0-25s, thanking God and praying for the next steps. To secure your free place at this General Assembly online fringe event, please [book your free place here](#).

Families on Faith Adventures @ Home



The Children's and Youth Work team continues to offer a weekly resource pack for families to explore Bible stories together. Now in its 14th week, **Families on Faith Adventures @ Home** explores Exodus and the story of Moses in its latest edition with a pick-and-mix selection of activities, prayers and challenges under the title [Whatever Next?](#)

This and past editions can be downloaded at: <https://urc.org.uk/resources-for-children-and-youth>.

The Big Speak Out Online



The annual residential for the 11-18 age group, Big Speak Out, has moved online this year. The [Big Speak Out Online](#) takes place over the weekend of **24 to 26 July** when young people will be able to join in with a range of sessions—some social, some Bible/theme-based discussion, workshops and preparation for an online worship which will be screened live on the Sunday. Naturally there will also be plenty of breaks. Be quick to sign up, as registration closes on Monday 13 July:

<https://forms.gle/pyyUicFiP9ZEjZs56>

Triologue – weekly YouTube broadcast



Every Thursday at 7.00pm, **URC Youth** hosts an interactive panel discussion live on [YouTube](#), designed for 16-25 year olds. Each session takes a Bible passage as a springboard for discussion and reflection on a theme. Viewers can comment in real time and past episodes remain available to [view online](#).

Triologue, which continues weekly into August before taking a summer break and resuming fortnightly in September, also has a

dedicated Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/URC-Youth-Triologue-114299337011121>

Opportunities at Westminster College

Westminster College, the United Reformed Church's **Resource Centre for Learning** in Cambridge, is now inviting applications for a wide range of short courses in the 2020-21 academic year. There are courses designed for anyone involved in lay or ordained ministry, but the following may be of particular interest to EM2 and EM3 ministers:

Creating New Christian Communities (28-30 October, 10 hours) a Pioneer / Fresh Expressions module led by Francis Brien

Reflective Practice: Relationships and Emotional Management (4-8 January, 20 hours)

Methods in Modern Theology (12-16 April, 20 hours)

Education for the Learning Church (10-14 May, 20 hours)

Themes in Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Care (MA level delivered on an online, asynchronous distance-learning model in the spring, 30 hours)

Further details are available at: <https://www.westminster.cam.ac.uk/urc/short-courses>

East Midlands Synod contacts

Please remember these recent updates to contact details at East Midlands Synod:

CONTACT DETAILS FOR THE NEW SYNOD PERSONNEL OFFICER

Robert White has now assumed this role: please email robertbwhite80@gmail.com

CONTACT DETAILS FOR OUR MODERATOR

The email address and mobile phone number for the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke** are:

Email: mod@urc5.org.uk

Mobile: 07544 959976

Synod Office: 0115 960 9241

CONTACT DETAILS FOR TRAINING

Hannah Holmes, PA to the TDO and CYDO, is currently on maternity leave.

For all training enquiries and bookings please contact **Derek Graham**, TDO in the first instance on:

Email: training@urc5.org.uk

Find us on Facebook

Our [East Midlands Synod Facebook Page](#) is a place of sharing and celebration, which continues to host the Evening Prayers led by our Moderator the **Revd Geoffrey Clarke** during the health crisis. If you are a Facebook user, please do **Like** and **Share** both the Page and its posts.

We also invite you to follow the [Synod Youth and Children's Facebook Page](#), which shares news and ideas related to our work with young people.

Office closure: please note

The **Synod Office** remains closed until further notice as we follow Government guidelines relating to the Covid-19 pandemic. **We are reviewing this situation on a month-by-month basis as official guidelines change.**

All members of staff are working from home: please e-mail them in the usual way. Contact details can be found at: <https://www.urc5.org.uk/synodstaff>. Telephone calls are forwarded, so to speak to a member of staff simply the usual office number of **0115 960 9241** between Monday-Thursday, 9am-3pm.

We regret we are unable to send out group emails or to mail newsletters during the office closure: please keep checking our website for the most recent information.

This E-letter is produced on behalf of:

The URC East Midlands Synod, 1 Edwards Lane, Sherwood, Nottingham, NG5 3AA.
Telephone: 0115 960 9241

Next edition: Thursday 23 July 2020

Please send all material for this E-Letter to both: modpa@urc5.org.uk and training@urc5.org.uk

Copy Date for next edition: 12 noon on Tuesday 21 July 2020